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More Whitewash Applied On McNamara's War

PATCHWORK POLICIES in the Viet Nam affair apparently have ripped another seam, and if those mind-
ing store in Washington know the score, again they aren't telling. Deep already in the enveloping mystery of that second Tonkin Gulf shooting, they leave a concerned American public in the dark; and the consequences are speculation and guesswork.

Now it is announced by what are called "informed sources"—with attribution painstakingly avoided—that the two-destroyer patrol involved in that incident of Friday has been withdrawn. By whose orders this disengagement in an area of confusion? It isn't said.

What's so hush-hush about McNamara's war that the truth can't be told? Why must it be screened and processed by the administration's agencies of news-management, and then spoon-fed in doses all sugared-up for public consumption?

Those are American sons engaged out there where they were sent—10,000 miles away—and many of them dying. Aren't the people entitled to know what is going on, and why?

In its news coverup, last week's Tonkin Gulf incident was another illustration of the managed-information policy, telling exactly nothing. Even the New York Times gagged on that one. Note its comment, rebuking the confusion that prevailed:

"The terse statement issued by Secretary McNamara more than 24 hours after he received his first news of the episode falls far short of adequacy, especially since he closed the door to all questions. Essentially the McNamara statement confirms an earlier unofficial account given correspondents in Washington that two United States destroyers patrolling the gulf in poor weather on a dark night opened fire after seeing radar evidence they interpreted as indicating that hostile craft were pursuing them. There was no visual sighting of the supposedly hostile vessels, nor has any claim been made of any overtly hostile act, such as firing of bullets or torpedoes at the American ships."

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THE UNITED STATES NAVY doesn't shoot at phantom targets. It doesn't fire without knowing what it is shooting at. So the confusion and uncertainty could only have been generated by these interpretive accounts, as far from the scene as Washington.

The Secretary of Defense didn't disclose anything at all. He simply clammed up—and so did President Johnson. The U.S. public, a part of whose Navy was engaged in that mysterious episode, is left to guess.

The enemy assuredly knows, if ships of its own fleet were engaged; and whether or not they were hit. So there could be no military secret involved, or classified information.

tion. Even Tass—the official Soviet news agency—got into the act; declaring that "U.S. warships fired on five unidentified ships in last Friday's Gulf of Tonkin incident, and three of them were sunk."

Whether or not one attaches any credibility to a Tass report, it certainly is true that the United States at home should not have to get ANY information from Tass.

Government-controlled news is a policy completely foreign to the United States. The practice of it sickens and outrages — particularly as a device patently adopted to cover up.

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WHAT ELSE has been covered up? Current events reported from Saigon tend to confirm a report emanating weeks ago from the Central Intelligence Agency. The paper in question, written by Willard Mathias of the CIA's Board of National Estimates, presented a pessimistic view of the Viet Nam crisis, substantiating charges that the administration's war there was going badly. It said:

"The counter-guerilla effort continues to flounder, partly because of the inherent difficulty of the problem, and partly because Diem's successors have not yet demonstrated the leadership and inspiration necessary. There remains serious doubt that victory can be won, and the situation remains very fragile."

"If large-scale U.S. support continues and if further political deterioration within South Viet Nam is prevented, at least a prolonged stalemate can be attained. There is also a chance that political evolution within the country and developments upon the world scene could lead to some kind of negotiated settlement based upon neutralization."

Is that what McNamara's war is all about? Is that the objective? A stalemate? A negotiated settlement, based on neutralization?

That isn't the way it has been billed until now, by those managing the news, and fantastically acclaiming the ability of successive governments at Saigon to stabilize Viet Nam and mobilize its people into an all-out effort in behalf of their own freedom.

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THE CONVULSION has come over there again—dispatches, not rerouted for Washington sugar-coating, telling that South Viet Nam appears "to be sliding rapidly toward general collapse."

That doesn't sound like a situation in which the enemy would seek settlement by negotiation.

In event of the collapse intimated, what is Washington's next move regarding the war in which victory hasn't been mentioned as an objective?

Withdrawal probably; there surely would be no more lives to expend in futile engagement there—in either the training or the combat capacity. And if that occurs, with military judgment instead of mediocre civilian Whiz Kid amateurs figuring in the eventual determination of security policy in the South Pacific, the fleet could be assigned to keep the area secure from Communist aggression.

The Navy with sea and air power could do that, as it has in the Formosa Straits. It always means business. It doesn't shoot at phantoms.